

David Clawson

Diana: What is your name?

David: David Clawson.

Diana: And where do you live?

David: West of Englewood Kansas.

Diana: And what is your occupation?

David: I'm a farmer and rancher.

Diana: How old are you?

David: 53.

Diana: So when did you first become aware of the Starbuck Fire, hereafter referred to simply as "the fire" of March 6?

David: It was a little after noon. Todd Cleckler, one of our employees who's on the Englewood Fire Department, called to let me know that he was on his way down to the fire, and thought it looked like it was headed directly toward our cattle that were west of Englewood.

Diana: Where were you and what was your first reaction?

David: I was in Plains eating lunch. My first thought was "I know the winds are strong, but we've had fires before. We've always been able to handle them." The wind did have me a little more on edge. I quickly finished lunch and headed down towards the cattle. Another employee was headed there as well to see if we could get the cattle moved out of harm's way. The first cattle we needed to get moved were in the Roger's pasture on Crooked Creek in Meade County.

Diana: Were you able to successfully move them?

David: By the time I got to where the cattle were, the fire was nearly there. Juan Mercado, one of our employees, was already there and working to get the cattle pulled up out of the tamarix. We use sirens on our pickups to call the cattle to the pickups and feed when we want to move them. That is what Juan was doing and trying to pull the cattle to the north. The Englewood fire trucks drove on the road on the south side of the Rogers pasture in their efforts to get to the fire. They had their sirens running. Because their sirens sound the same as ours, this caused our cattle to get pulled south to where the fire trucks had gone instead. So we changed tactics, and pulled all of them across the creek to the south end of the pasture. The fire was coming directly up Crooked Creek, but we were able to get all but about 40 head out of that pasture. We then moved them about a mile north to a wheat field.

Diana: Did you evacuate your house?

David: No.

Diana: What did you do when the fire came to your property?

Diana: The cattle we were moving were on some of our property in Meade County. It did appear that the fire was headed directly toward my house. However, before I could worry about my house, we had some other cattle between where I was and where our house is. We were all thinking about those cattle first. There was no one at my house. My wife was over at

our family office in Plains, so I was okay with not needing to get anyone out of the house.

Because my pickup doesn't have a siren, I went to get Todd's pickup in Englewood at the Fire Station. I wanted his pickup with the siren so the cattle would follow me. By the time I got his pickup in Englewood, and headed back toward the cattle that needed moved, I couldn't get to them because the fire had already come across. I did try to go through an area that was pure black with smoke and soot. I went about a quarter of a mile, and then realized I just couldn't continue in that direction. I could look down and see I was still on the road, but that is all I could see. Then I thought "Well how stupid am I? Someone else is going to be coming right at me, and I won't be able to see them." I knew there was a wheat field right there on the side of the road that I could get to. So I pulled out in the wheat field, saw the rows of wheat, and followed the rows until I got out of the smoke. I then headed north up towards my house. In the meantime, Juan Mercado and Dean Bird, our employees, got the other bunch of cattle moving. They got them pulled out of the pasture and was moving them north right ahead of the fire. The head of the fire was south of us, so it was the side of the fire that they were having to keep ahead of.

Diana: Did you see more than smoke, did you actually see flames?

David: While I was in the completely blacked out smoke and soot area, no, I didn't see the fire. It was just like the dark of night. It was...

Diana: Couldn't see anything?

David: No, it was dark. You could feel the heat because there was a lot of CRP and a lot of grass on the south side of where I was. The wind was blowing from the southwest, so it was blowing directly at me.

Diana: You could tell it was moving pretty fast?

David: Oh, unbelievably. I couldn't believe how quick it got there. So I turned around and I went to my house. You just react and start doing what you can to try to save the farmstead because you know it's coming.

Diana: Yes. So what type of things did you do to prepare for the fire?

David: Well, we had blades on tractors. Two of us were on tractors with blades, and we started making fire breaks the best we could with the blades. Looking back and seeing the speed it was moving - those blades weren't doing anything, but we thought we were doing something. You are just reacting at that point, because it's moving so fast.

Diana: You'd had some knowledge or experience with wildfires in the past, right?

David: Yes.

Diana: And how would you compare this fire to what you were used to?

David: There's no comparison. I mean this one was so massive, and the speed that this thing moved. There was so much fuel there. The fuel and the wind, in combination with the low humidity, I had never faced anything like this before because it was making its own wind. Then it would shoot out and it would just combust out in front of it, and you could see the heat of it. Because of the speed of it, there was nothing you could do. We all understood, "Okay, we can't do anything with the fire, so we'll see if we can save structures." That's what the fire department was already doing.

Diana: So there were fire trucks at your place?

David: Yes.

Diana: Were they able to save some buildings for you?

David: Well the fire actually veered to the south, and it looked like it might not come north up to my house.

So, the fire trucks went down towards Englewood. That's where they were needed the most and that's where they should have been. The problem was the side fires. They would shoot out far enough to catch wind and then they would make their own head fire. So the main fire that started everything was probably over close to Gardiner's or maybe even past them already. By the time the big fire hit our location, it was already all around Englewood. The fire trucks and firemen were all down there fighting it. There was one fire truck that went around our house a couple of times right before the fire hit. Greg Goodnight and Chris Kay were driving that fire truck, and they came back to our house.

Diana: Did they foam your house?

David: Yes.

Diana: Any other structures?

David: No, just the house.

Diana: And how many times did the fire come across your property. How many times were there flames that actually came across?

David: Umm.

Diana: Just once?

David: Yes. I mean we had the one big push and actually about a quarter mile north from my house was the north edge. So we had that big push that come through. There were enough farmers around there that were able to get the side fires put out and to keep it from building back up. So there were blades and disks and everything to knock that down.

Diana: What time do you think the fire hit your property?

David: I think it was around 4:00. I guess I could look back at some of my pictures because there are some time stamps on those.

Diana: You probably are pretty close. Once the fire was past your location, did you go to help fight fire other places or did you try to...

David: We were still working on putting out side fires because we were on the northern edge of the fire. We were trying to just get as much shut down as we could, so if the wind did change it wouldn't come back on the area where we were at. This continued all night long, and we finally wore out.

Diana: Were you up most of the night?

David: I wasn't, but my son was. I actually twisted my ankle bad enough that I had to go get an X-ray. So I wasn't any good to anyone.

Diana: So did you feel the temperature drop?

David: What do you mean?

Diana: When you were out doing stuff, when the fire came through, when the wind shifted?

David: When the wind shifted and came out of the north, that's what really kind of prevented the fire from moving further north and cooled the temperatures down. I think it was between four and five in the afternoon when that front come through. The wind shifted from blowing out of the southwest and west to primarily being out of the north. That kind of

defined that edge and we were able to get it knocked out. The wind shift really helped in fighting the fire where we were at. And yes, we felt the temperature change. So it was in the 80's, and the fire made it a lot hotter. Anyway the temperatures were in the 80s and then that night it got cold.

Diana: So then on Tuesday, did you have any fires that were visible around your property?

David: Oh absolutely. Tuesday is when we were able to start getting into the draws where we couldn't get to the day or night before. The Fowler Fire Department and a few from the Englewood Fire Department were up in our area getting the fires in the draws put out, and doing some back burning. The night before, on Monday night, I sent one of my employees with one of the tractors that had a blade on it to Sand Creek to get that edge put out. The water table there is about a foot down, and that tractor just fell straight through, all four wheels, and you couldn't do anything. It was really stuck. The grass was waist high or higher - it was big grass. The fire was back burning and then back burned in underneath the tractor. It was going to take me 30 to 45 minutes to get any tractor down there to pull the stuck tractor out, but it was too late. The employee was able to get out and away from the tractor, but the fire completely destroyed the tractor.

Diana: So, do you have any family history of wildfires? Or know how your ancestors felt about wildfires?

David: Yes. My grandfather grew up over around Sun City. He moved to the Hitchland, Texas area south of Hooker, Oklahoma. He was farming and ranching there. He was always really worried about fire, and it terrified him. I often think back to why Grandpa kept this grass so short. First, he really wanted to use the grass, but I also think that there was something in the back of his mind from always having to deal with fires. If the grass didn't get too tall, maybe he wouldn't have the big fires.

Diana: So, in that area over there (in the Englewood, area), has there been lots of fires in the years that you have been out there?

David: We moved to the area in December 1995. I was immediately introduced to the Englewood Fire Department because it has such a vital role. All of us over in the Englewood area are on the Englewood Fire Department. I just haven't been very active in helping fight fires because I'm usually not in the area when the alarm goes out that there is a fire. But yes, there are always fires. When the lightning comes in, when there's dry grass, we're always looking to see if anything's going to catch fire and take off.

Diana: So do you keep a spray rig at your property?

David: No, we didn't before, but we have one now! We actually planned to do some controlled burns this year to try to control some of our red cedars that are really starting to flourish. Since that was our plan, we had purchased this truck, but we hadn't received it yet. We were going to try to see if we could control the undesirables and help the grass by doing controlled burns. But, we didn't expect anything like this.

Diana: Did this take care of some of those red cedars for you?

David: Yes, it did. However, the area on our property where they are the worst is just north of where the fire burned. I actually thought about starting a fire, and doing a back burn to get them taken care of, but that wasn't the right thing to do at that time.

Diana: I know there were a lot of back burns that were started just to help take care of stuff.

David: It's an excellent tool for all of us to remember to use.

Diana: Is it becoming more common in this area to do controlled burns?

David: It believe it will. It's not very common now, but there are some of us that see that it's the only way we can get rid of some of these encroaching red cedars. When you go to Barber County and see how bad it can get, we realize that if we don't get ahead of them, this area will look just like that over east.

Diana: So did you have a lot of loss of animals?

David: I only lost about 40 cows. We hadn't started calving yet, which was a real blessing. The cows we lost were in that very first bunch that we moved right at the start of the fire, the one's that had been in the Rogers pasture. We were just so fortunate that we were on the north edge of the fire. My neighbors bore the brunt of the tragedy of this fire.

Diana: Did you find it necessary to shoot some of the animals.

David: Oh yes.

Diana: What were some of the reasons that made it necessary?

David: Oh, these cows were blind, no ears, burnt udders, seared skin - I don't know how they were still alive when we had to decide to put them down. There were some that were extremely bad off that putting them down was an easy decision. But there were others for which the decision was much more difficult. We had some that we knew had suffered through tremendous heat because their ear tags had melted and were over a foot long. You couldn't really tell if they were blind or not, but their udders were singed badly, and they had lost a lot of hair. We had to decide if they could possibly recover. Often their hooves looked fine and they were moving around well. For these it was hard to decide what to do. On some of them, we waited a little bit. We eventually had to put most of these down. There was one cow 30 days after the fire. It was the end of March, first part of April and the damage to her began to show up. We had missed her all of the times we had checked. She was with the herd all of the time, but we finally discovered that she was completely blind. The heat must have been internal, and it finally worked its way to the outside. She started just shedding skin, and that's how we finally figured out that she was injured badly. But we had missed her the whole time up until then, and all of a sudden I had to put her down. That was the last one I had to put down.

Diana: So did you find a lot of wildlife that was harmed by the fire.

David: Oh yes. I mean, there was no wildlife left. The only blessing I'd say is we don't have skunks under our house anymore!. We haven't smelt a skunk since the fire, around the house. About a week after the fire, we went out to the barn and Jeanne opened the door and there was a raccoon. He was singed really badly and was just sitting there. He was in a lot of pain, and could barely move. It was like he showed up in our barn to say, "Can you put me out of my misery?" It just decimated the wildlife. .

Diana: So how did you dispose of most of the cattle that you...

David: We dug holes out in the pasture and buried them.

Diana: Did you have to document, did somebody come help you document?

David: Yes, we had veterinarians and other people help document.

Diana: So what about pasture and fencing? Did you lose a lot of that?

David: Yes. For the most part, it was the south end of our ranch that burned, and we lost a lot of that fence. We still don't quite have all of the perimeter fences up. We're working on that. I'm planning to change the locations of some of the interior fence. I haven't decided for sure how, but I'm going to change it from what it was.

Diana: So did you receive volunteer help?

David: Yes. That was probably the highlight of this whole experience. The blessings that we got back from this disaster it just... it's just unbelievable. I mean, they showed up to take fence out just out of nowhere. They'd show up to build fence, to do whatever. The hay... It's overwhelming.

Diana: Did you receive some of the hay donations?

David: Yes. I even got some from the tip of the thumb of Michigan.

Diana: Did you have to go in to where they were collecting it, or did they bring it out to your ranch?

David: They brought it out to the ranch. There was so much hay that came in while the fires were still burning, that we in Englewood, put a bunch in town. We didn't have a place that was safe from fire. About a week or 10 days after the fire, we found two or three trucks that would deliver it. We got it all out and delivered it to all the ranches in the area that needed it.

Diana: So, did you go to Ashland where they had volunteers at the camp or places that people could eat? Or in Englewood where they had food? Did you take part in that?

David: Well, Holly Fast organized a lot of the volunteer help. Really, you think about the people of Ashland and what they did. They stepped up. The Christian camp - getting that going to house and feed all of the volunteers. The organization and orderliness of everything was amazing. It took all those Ashland volunteers to step up to make all of this work. They got all of this help out to the various ranches. I received numerous phone calls saying "I've got this many people. Do you need them, and can you use them?" We were just tickled to have them, and the relationships we have built with these people are really cool.

Diana: So mostly when they came out, did they tear down your fence.

David: Yes.

David: And did you have people rebuild too?

David: We had nearly all the people that came out take down fence. This was an easy job and they didn't need oversight. You worry about the people that want to build fence. We are tickled they want to do it, but we didn't know how they were going to do it, and how well it would be done. There was a group of 12 from southeast Iowa that came out. A neighbor and I put them to work rebuilding a 1/2 mile of fence over east of my house in the sandhills. We wanted to see how well they did, and they did a beautiful job. After I saw what a great job they did, I had them build a mile and a half of fence where all of the corners had already been put up. It only took them about six hours. They put up a great fence in a short amount of time. They were so well organized and the corners were already there and there was no mowing that needed done. They were just like a machine. So it was just tremendous.

Diana: So how long did they stay and help on your ranch?

David: They worked on our ranch for about a day, and then they moved on. We wanted all of the volunteers to get passed around, didn't want to hog all of the help. Those people are amazing. All of them are really. To come out and spend time out here.

Diana: So what's your most vivid memory at the fire?

David: The massiveness and the speed at which it burned is probably the most vivid. You sit back and think about how fast that thing was moving and how big it was. I sat and watched it coming across some CRP. It's a miracle that no one was killed. There was the one trucker that was killed by the smoke inhalation over east of Ashland. There were so many of us that did so many stupid things. God's hand was on a lot of us. We don't realize it until we look back and see how lucky we really are.

Diana: So what's your emotional response to the fire now? Like at the time you remember how you felt?

David: I had the opportunity to speak about it a week ago, and I thought I was fine. But when I got to the pictures of the cows, that still cut. You think about the pain they went through. We're made to take care of those animals. That's our job.

We know they're going to be processed for meat. But... having to go and put them out of their misery after we know what they experienced, and they are still alive. It is still tough.

Diana: Like you said, you found that one cow a long time after the rest of it. Did you have any miracle cattle come out of the bush that got missed by the fire?

David: Well there were some that somehow got into the stock tanks and their tops were singed a little bit and their ear tags were but somehow they were able to live through it. Those were the only ones that I saw that... I don't know if it's a miracle, but they were just lucky to be able to get into the stock tanks.

Diana: So did you lose some stock tanks, or windmills, or solar windmill type stuff?

David: We really didn't. I think around those tanks that's it's beat down enough and there's really no fuel like big grass or anything. Even though there was a lot of heat, it wasn't enough to do anything to the tanks or the windmills. We were lucky there.

Diana: Did you lose any electricity at your house?

David: Oh, yeah. I mean there's a ton of electric poles that were burned down.

Diana: So how long did it take you to get electricity back after that?

David: We are right at the start of the whole line that comes down and across from the eleven mile corner, so we were one of the first ones to get electricity back on. Our neighbors to the south took longer to get power back.

Diana: So like a day?

David: Yes, I think we were without electricity for about a day.

Diana: So you're also on the Kansas Livestock Association board, and they came in and sent help for the area. Can you talk about what happened there, and how that got started?

David: Since the Anderson Creek fire happened last year over in Comanche and Barber County, the people in the KLA office were aware of how people want to help in a situation like this. They immediately started getting calls from people within the state, and across the nation wondering how to help and what could they do? The KLA staff began organizing hay donations, and they worked with Neil Kay down at Ashland Feed and Seed to see where it needed to go. So hay donations, fencing supplies, monetary donations, and people - they helped organize with Holly and everyone at Ashland Feed and Seed. And even then in Ashland they worked with Greg Goodnight on getting the hay and supplies into Englewood.

Because they had a fund developed last year after Anderson Creek to take monetary donations, they were already organized to do the same with the Starbuck Fire. All of the ranchers that were affected could apply for those donations. The amount of lost fence and cattle were the main criteria used to disperse these donated funds out, so people could start building their herds and fences back

Diana: So have people been able to start purchasing cattle again?

David: I don't know if they have or not. I think they've got some funds to be able to start a little bit, but I don't know if they've actually bought any cattle yet. The grass really came back because of the rain in April and May, but the heat that we got in June and July didn't allow it to grow a whole lot. We have cover, which we're tickled with, but there's not a lot there. We won't know until next spring as to what we really have. I don't know if a lot of people are really... we just haven't decided to add a lot of cattle back yet because we're still trying to figure out what the grass can handle. It is not ready to handle as many cattle as we had been putting on it in the past.

Diana: And then also the interior fences that people haven't really got to yet?

David: Right.

Diana: So has the KLA dispersed most of that money now?

David: Yes, they did that. I believe it was the day before Ashland Feed and Seed's anniversary celebration - most people got a check from KLA the Friday before that. So it's been well over a month ago. People got these donated funds pretty quickly. There was about \$2.7 million donated to the fire fund, but it didn't all come to this area. There were six or seven other fires in the state where some of the donated funds were distributed, but the majority of it came to this area. It's a huge boost to the economy here.

Diana: So speaking of the different fires that were on that day, which kind of limited the amount of help that came in. Did you get to see the strike teams that came in? Did you get to work with them?

David: Well, I got to visit with them. That was amazing in itself, because we got people from almost to the Utah border in Colorado that come in. Those guys were just so happy to be here and help. Experienced firefighters that work those forest fires coming out and relieving our guys, because our guys were just beat. A lot of the local firemen went two full days without sleep and just kept going. When the relief and strike forces arrived, I just sat there and said, "Those guys were a gift from God." They didn't charge us anything.

Diana: The state pays. Did they talk about the difference in the way they fight fire and how we fight fire here?

David: I did not get to talk to them about that. The firefighter crews from Englewood and Ashland probably got to talk a little bit more about that, and that would have been interesting, but I didn't take the time that I should've in talking to them.

Diana: You were busy doing cattle.

David: Yes, but the longer you live life, the more you realize it's about relationships, and they're far more important than the rest of the stuff.

Diana: So what people or agencies were instrumental in helping with this fire? Who do you think was most helpful?

David: I'm just telling you my experience. I know Millie Fudge, and she had more to do with a lot of the other agencies and organizing what was going on. But from my experience, I know that first week after the fire, I was talking to the vets, and they were burdened with having to put a lot of the injured animals down. It was tremendously draining on them. Their livelihood and desire is to take care of animals, and here they are having to go out and just shoot the ones that they know are in pain. You get to the point where you can't do it anymore. So there were some ranchers from outside the fire area that came in and helped them. Especially helpful were the game wardens that came in from around the state to aide in putting these animals down. On day the governor showed up and the secretary of AG, Jackie McClaskey came with him - about an hour before I arrived to talk to Jackie and the governor, I got a call from John Kellenberger. He said the game wardens just got pulled off. They said they had to go home; and couldn't help anymore.

You know he was emotional. All of us were. I immediately told Jackie what was going on. They got them (the game wardens) turned around and coming back immediately. It had something to do with the National Guard thinking they needed to put these animals down instead of the game wardens. You get into that bureaucratic crap, and you can't get anything done. The governor and secretary McClaskey cut through this and got the help back right away. So I'm tremendously thankful for both Governor Brownback and Jackie for getting that help turned around. The relationships between the veterinarians and the game wardens had already been established. They were able to tell the game warden that I want that one, that one and that one put down. Then the veterinarians would turn the other way to evaluate some other animals while the game warden took care of it. A

lot of pressure was taken off our local people that way.

Diana: With them being familiar with the area or with the animals and stuff. Can you perceive anything positive that's resulted from this fire?

David: I guess that all I see are blessings. The hay that came in immediately, the fencing supplies, all the people - I mean thousands of people just dropped everything and came to help. I had a lady that's a schoolteacher from Parsons, KS and her husband who is an engineer. They were going to go to Memphis on spring break. But they said no, we're going to go out and help with this. They just showed up and they got out there in the soot and started rolling up fence, instead of taking their spring break. There's hundreds of stories like that. And I've heard a lot of them where people would just drop things to come help. So, I guess, for as devastating as it was, I think we've gotten more blessings out of it from those people, and what they've done. The people in this community, and the state, and the nation all together, it's just... It's really overwhelming. It's kind of hard to grasp, the size of it.

Diana: So what do you think about the way the media treated the incidents of the fires in March and how social media really helped?

David: Social media was the only way this story of the fire got out. The national media was not helpful with this at all. I'll give you a good example of the national media showing up. John Kellenberger was over in Meade, and again this is only 10 days after the fire. It was one of those nasty windy days, where everything was moving - dirt and soot. It wasn't pretty. John says, "I have a news reporter with me, and he wants to go into the fire area, and he'd like talk to a rancher along with me."

I said, "Okay, come on." I met them, and it was *NBC Nightly News*. We were both a little nervous because this was the national media. I said to John, "Let's just be positive and talk about all of the positive things that are going on, and tell how we're handling things and moving forward." We spent time with them and they interviewed us. Can you guess how much of the story was shown on the nightly news cast? Zero. Because we weren't negative. What they wanted was for us to be negative and say how bad everything was. We had decided ahead of time that we weren't going to do that, and I believe that is why our story didn't make it onto the news. It was social media that really helped us rather than the national media. President Trump actually knew about what was going on, and he opened up CRP pretty quickly for us to be able to graze where it didn't burn. He did what he could to help us here.

Diana: So right now Montana has fires kind of like our fires. How does that compare to what we went through?

David: I think it's the same. Several of us around here actually are getting lots of hay headed that way to help the ranchers that are experiencing the fires in Montana. I purchased some hay in Nebraska, and Stan Hazen is picking it up and taking it up there. We're trying to pay forward the best we can. And we're trying to help with the Houston flooding and other places that need an extra hand. We don't have to be out front. We just like to do things where we can to help out.

Diana: So what are your thoughts about the agricultural community and how they responded to the fire and having to put cattle down and stuff?

David: You know, you run out of adjectives to talk about how great it is. Really what you do because you just can't... you can't put into words how good it is. All of this has made me realize how pathetic I am. I have often seen other people going through struggles and trials, and I would say a little prayer and maybe send a little money. But people from across the nation just dropped what they were doing to come and to help you in any way they could - just to help you heal. So it has shown me how much better I need to do, because it's amazing. These people are amazing.

Diana: Is that in part the work ethic of the agriculture industry?

David: I don't know. It might be more about morals. You know we have a heart for other people. There is a definite work ethic with that, but I guess I haven't thought about it that much.

Diana: Have you done things to prepare for a future fire like this or any kind of disaster?

David: We don't know how to prepare for something like this. I know the fire department, and the state, and all of us were trying to talk this through. Do we need to put firebreaks up? How big of a fire break are you going to put up to handle something like this? It will be at least a quarter mile long and then you have to try to figure out a way to start back burning out ahead of that. And then, how do you know what direction it's coming from? You will have the fire break going the wrong way and where is it going to start? You can prepare some, but not all fires will be prevented. It might help but...

Diana: The communities, did we do well on communications on making sure everybody knew what everyone was doing throughout the fire, or was it just such a massive fire that it wasn't possible to do a lot?

David: This fire was so massive and so fast, that we weren't capable of that kind of communication. The fire trucks would find a house and do what they could to protect it. And that's what they should have done. They did a great job. They were able to save every house they were able to get to. The ones they didn't get to were the ones that were lost. Communication between the different fireman helped them to save most structures.

The communication between each rancher with the other was just like that. For example, Mike McCarty was on Greg Goodnights disk right there by my house trying to help - trying to disk a fire break along with those of us on tractors with blades. He got lost down below my house when the fire hit, and none of us could see him. So you talk about communications! Using cell phones was a great way to keep in touch. We loved the phones. I was able to call him when he couldn't see his way out and he said, "I'm okay, I can't see anything, It's hot, but I'm on disked ground, I'm okay." And then once the smoke and soot cleared, we were able to get him out.

The communication after this experience is probably the thing that I have liked the best. We've been calling each other to check up on how each other is doing. We'd see people on the road and stop and visit a little bit. We know which ranchers were the most devastated. We've tried to come alongside them and call them and encourage them. It has been a Community Development Program. So there's another blessing that came out of it. We were joined together to try to help each other out the best we can.

Diana: Did cell phones work better than radios?

David: Much. Well, because you carry your cell phone. When you're in the fire truck between firefights the radios are great, but the cell phones worked better for what we were doing.

Diana: So, do you have any other thoughts about this experience that you'd like to share? What about your family? Where were they, and how did you communicate with them during the fire and after the fire? Because I'm sure all of your family doesn't live close.

David: Well, I'd texted them a video of the fire probably around 2:00 in the afternoon, and I said it looks like it's going to miss us, because the head of it was south of us and I thought we were going to be all right. Little did I know that another one was coming around farther north. Our son Carl and his wife Ann showed up right away to do what they could. Carl was the one that stayed up all through the night to make sure everything was going like it should, and knocking down the side fires.

Before the fire hit the house, Denise Cleckler, Todd's wife, was taking a lot of the pictures there around the house. She asked me "What do you want me to get out of house?" And you know, you don't think about that until you're faced with something like this, and you don't know where to start.

I said, "Nothing. There's no one in there, so let's just try to save it." I was ready to just let it all go, because there wasn't anyone in there, and it was okay. After Denise asked me that, I started thinking that maybe my wife

Jeanne better come home. I called Jeanne and told her "I think you better get home, and plan on the way home what you are going to take out of the house."

Diana: She might have a different opinion?

David: She'd have a different opinion, but not too much. She was just happy that nobody got hurt.

Diana: So how frustrating was it to you that you messed up your ankle and couldn't help?

David: Oh, tremendously, but, what can you do about it. I was pulling the hose around the west side the house and I stepped off a ledge and I was on my face before I knew it.

Diana: Did you have physical loss at your ranch, at your homestead?

David: Yes. There was an 80 by 200 foot Quonset that was built in the 1940s. It had a cement floor poured by hand. It had a 40 foot tall huge hayloft. It was a landmark in that area that everyone knew about. The local kids all grew up playing in the hay, playing in that barn. When that fire come through, my brother, Dan, was actually on a skid steer keeping the fire from getting to it and we thought we had it saved. We thought we were all right. Next thing, we looked up and embers had got up in the loft. There was so much wood, and it was old dry wood. So it really just combusted. We lost that shed.

Diana: So has it changed the landscape near your house?

David: Yes, quite a bit. The ranch is called The Grove Ranch because there's a three quarter mile long grove of trees running east of the house. That is all gone. We will still call it the Grove Ranch, but it will be because of its history, because the grove doesn't exist anymore.

Diana: Trees still there, just burnt?

David: Yes.

Diana: And how are they burned? Did they lose their bark?

David: There was a bunch that the bark blew off immediately and there are some that are losing it now. The fire was so intense that it just killed the trees. We had all those tumbleweeds from 2011,12, and 13 that had gotten in there, so that whole matt of tumble weeds in there gave it that much more fuel, and all the dead wood that was there on the ground.

Diana: So are you surprised at what the fire did burn, and what it didn't burn?

David: Very. You look over at our house, right west of our house, and there is a grove of elm trees. It didn't touch those trees, but it touched all the trees to the south and a whole tree row to the east. To the north, it got a lot of those trees and it got the Quonset. But why didn't it get those elm trees? And if it did, that would have taken the house. It's kind of like a tornado. When a tornado goes through, you wonder, "Why didn't it do this, or do that." These natural disasters. We always just have questions.

Diana: Did you ever go east of Ashland after the fire.

David: Yes. It took a while because the path of devastation was so massive. It just took a long time to get around the east and north side of this fire.

Diana: When did you find out that there were actually two different fires that came together?

David: It was probably a week later, before someone said there was another one up north. They just come together. I actually got some video from the weather service showing that, if you would like that. It's pretty interesting.

Diana: So considering the magnitude of the fires, is it incredible so few people were hurt?

David: I mean you're probably getting to talk to all these people, so you know some of the stupid things that we did, and wonder, "How did that happen without them getting hurt."

Diana: So do you have any other thoughts you'd like to share?

David: No. Right now I've just... got tremendous gratitude for all the help that's come in and I'm thankful for the rain that came the end of March. We got ground cover. Everything is starting to heal. We've got a new normal. And so we will deal with it and we are thankful for our neighbors that we have, and the community that we live in.